

## Grey-necked Picathartes: how to see one

Without a doubt one of the birds to see in Central and West Africa is Picathartes. Perhaps one illustration of the popular appeal of this bird is the use by two major travel companies of this bird in advertisements, called Picathartes by one and Rockfowl by the other (on facing pages of *Bull ABC* 1 (1)).

The previous account of seeing White-necked Picathartes can largely be applied to Grey-necked too. Grey-necked Picathartes might be found in any well-forested area with large rocks, within its range; however, the slopes of Mount Cameroon or Mount Kupe are as good a place as any to find them. Mount Kupe is probably the most easily accessible.

Nyasoso, where the BirdLife International Mount Kupe Forest Project is based has suitable accommodation and is reached by a series of bush taxis from Douala via Loum and Tombel. The driving time is less than three hours in the dry season (see Bowden and Andrews<sup>1</sup> for more detail).

Permission should be sought from the local chief before setting off onto the mountain. Ask to be taken to the Paramount Chief, Chief Ntoko, in Nyasoso who will be very welcoming and is always interested to meet visitors. He also appreciates the formalities being carried out correctly.

The path out of the village leads round the edge of the secondary school grounds from where a marked track takes you to the start of the nature trail which has been set up by the BirdLife project. The trail is an easy, circular walk of less than one kilometre. A very obvious large rock seven or eight metres tall marks the highest point on the route. Look underneath the rock and you will find a large cleft which opens out into a broad low cave; a perfect place for Picathartes. Take a few steps back along the trail to get a better view of the entrance and sit quietly to wait for one to bound past. Make yourself comfortable as you may need to wait for several hours. If the picathartes watching is proving fruitless then take a break by climbing around

the back of the rock where you will find a ladder. This will take you to the top of the rock to give a fabulous view into and through the forest canopy. Returning to earth, follow round the rock from the bottom of the ladder and you will come out above a small rocky valley. It can be profitable to look down onto this area for a while. You can also climb directly up the slope behind the rock. There is no path and it is steep, hard going, so is best attempted in the cool of the early morning. The tactic is to creep forward, stopping at

frequent intervals, to look, listen and catch your breath. Watch for the shaking of a low branch to reveal a motionless perching bird. You may be luckier and catch sight of this seemingly grotesque yet surprisingly graceful animal sweeping over the rocks or leaping between tree roots on the forest floor. The birds are most often located first by the quiet, drawn out rasping call, but be prepared for a picathartes to pop out unannounced from behind any one of the boulders which lie

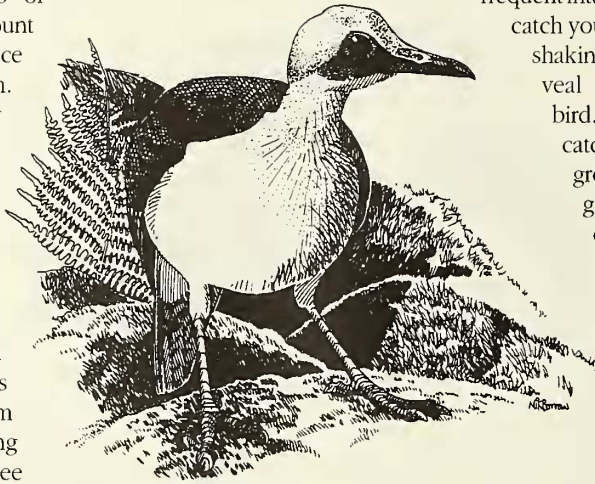
strewn down the steep slopes. The large mud nests can be found in this area too, but beware, the structures survive from previous years and some might not be recent.

To go above and beyond the nature trail, one will need to be prepared with insect repellent and machete and it is advisable to hire a guide such as Epie Ngome. He is an ex-hunter who lives in Nyasoso who knows the mountain and its wildlife as well as anyone and is a delightful person with whom to spend a day. The project will recommend others if he is not available.

It is an indication of how Cameroon is coming to value its wildlife that both the Grey-necked Picathartes and the Mount Kupe Bush-shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis* have appeared on postage stamps. A good way to advertise the delights of this ornithologically important country. ☺

1. *Bull. ABC*. 1(1):13-18 (1994)

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Grey-necked Picathartes *Picathartes oreas*  
By Nik Borrow of courtesy of Birdquest Ltd